

First Day—Wednesday, January 4, 2023

Journal of the House

ONE HUNDRED SECOND GENERAL ASSEMBLY
of the
STATE OF MISSOURI

FIRST REGULAR SESSION

FIRST DAY, WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 4, 2023

ADDRESS BY SPEAKER DEAN PLOCHER

Congratulations to each and every one of you!

It is through hard work, determination, and a passion for serving others that you have earned the title of State Representative. I want to thank all of you so much for your support, and for the confidence you have placed in me to serve as your Speaker. It is an honor and privilege to serve with you, and to serve the State of Missouri during this 102nd General Assembly. It has been an honor to serve alongside those who have left the House, some of whom are with us today.

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Each of us arrived here to serve our great state from a similar path. Through effort, listening to Missourians, belief in democracy, sacrifice, and help.

We are blessed to have our families and friends who have supported us in this journey and our commitment to public service. I hope the time spent in this Chamber will be some of the most rewarding moments of our lives. Our families and friends, and *their* efforts, and *their* sacrifices, make this possible for us.

There are no amount of words I can use to fully describe my appreciation for my wife, Rebecca. It is only because of her countless efforts and unwavering commitment that I am able to serve in the people's house.

She has believed in me every step of the way. She is my biggest supporter but also the one who keeps me humble and focused. She has tirelessly participated/contributed/worked in so many ways, so I can stand here and have the honor of holding this office. She is the one deserving of so much more. I am blessed beyond measure to have her in my life. She is my partner and best friend.

Rebecca, I love you dearly, and I know that we accomplished this together because of all you have done for me and our family! I am eternally grateful.

Would you please join me in a round of applause for all of our significant others and loved ones who have made our service here possible.

Those that know me, know Rebecca, and you know we are fortunate to have two great children, Owen and Stella. Rebecca and I began this journey believing that being a State Representative was not a career choice, but a call to serve a greater cause. We did so because we had children and believe strongly in giving them the same opportunities we have had.

Having children and witnessing current events gave us a sense of urgency, so all of our children can pursue and achieve the American Dream.

American democracy is not free. We each have to work and sacrifice to ensure and protect our representative government and these sacred values of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Owen and Stella were young when I first entered public service. I am grateful for their support for this work. They have helped in so many ways. I am so very proud of them for all they are doing and how they are growing up.

I love you, Owen and Stella!

You remind me every day why we are here—to leave the next generation of Missourians with more opportunities, to create a tomorrow that is better than today, and to give all of those that follow us the freedom and opportunity to achieve their own American Dream.

I am fortunate, too, to have parents who placed great emphasis on education, the value of personal responsibility, and hard work. My mother is with us today. Thank you for everything, mom.

I'm eternally grateful for my parents' sacrifices. They believed in a better future for their children and passed that legacy onto me.

My father, while not with us, has left an indelible memory residing in me and I will do my best to carry on his legacy.

Let me also welcome my other family members with us today: my sister-in-law, Stacy; her husband, Kevin; and their children, Nora & Jillian.

Not with us today are my father & mother-in-law, Vince & Linda, who likewise believed in public service and passed their values on to my wife and believed in me from the beginning.

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My aunt and cousins who traveled from San Diego, and my other family members, I am grateful we are able to be together today.

To my friends and supporters who have stood by me on this journey, thank you for everything you've done to make this day possible.

And let me share one final but incredibly important thank you. To the person who has worked tirelessly to help not only me, but all of you - Diana Hennerich. No one in this building is more dedicated or more capable than Diana. Diana, thank you!

All of us serving in this amazing building know that we do not serve alone. We are surrounded by those dedicated to serving Missouri.

From our staff to our research analysts and the bill drafters, who make our ideas for legislation a reality, to the ones who maintain the beauty of these halls and this Chamber day after day, and to our staff who work behind the scenes to make all of this possible: they are the ones who provide the resources and support we need to succeed, and they work with us to make Missouri an even better place to call home.

Please join me in thanking each of them.

Being here is a call to serve. And when you are here, you don't just go home and forget about the day. Rather, our efforts when working to pass a bill require patience and persistence, all of which seemingly reverberate for months from January to May, and often for years, as failure is common and success is rare.

Democracy requires diligence. Thoughtful, well-vetted legislation takes time. It's a process in which we all have a part to play.

Today, we reaffirm our belief in this process, in our belief in democracy, and responsible, effective, smaller government that protects our individual freedoms.

We are all participants in this great experiment, where we have the freedom to discuss our differences in opinion. We are blessed to live in a country with a Bill of Rights that guarantees those freedoms.

Even in dissent, we try to find common ground, to work for democracy, and work for our Missouri values to preserve the American Dream for future generations.

As Speaker, this is my charge to keep. I am mindful of the responsibilities that come with democracy and freedom.

The American Dream is achieved through hard work, commitment to freedom, education, as well as individual and fiscal responsibility. I will work toward an agenda that promotes each of these values because they empower Missourians.

Over the last several years, the Missouri Legislature has:

- Cut taxes – The largest in Missouri's history.
- Strengthened Missouri's agricultural industry, and protected our farmers and our individual property rights.
- Ensured every patient has the right to have an advocate by their side in a hospital.
- Preserved the integrity of our elections and every Missourian's vote.
- Prioritized a fiscally responsible state budget that invested in education at record levels.
- And we have witnessed Missouri's lowest unemployment rate in our history, well below the national average.

This has benefited every Missourian!

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But even as Missouri has thrived and succeeded in so many areas, we have also experienced unprecedented challenges such as COVID and a greater, almost suffocating influence from our federal government threatening the very concept of federalism.

We've seen the devastating effects of violent crime and dangerous streets in our communities. Missourians should not have to contend with violent crime. Families and children should not have to live in fear. Small businesses should not have to worry about damage to property or threats to employees.

Not only are there innocent victims, but such crime further destabilizes our families and communities, affecting all of us.

I care deeply about every Missourian who has been a victim of a crime. I understand why they have lost trust in dysfunctional local governments where some officials refuse to prosecute violent offenders. I sympathize with these families who have seen their streets become less and less safe as crime has enveloped their communities.

We cannot be bystanders as unchecked crime causes the systematic destruction of our proud state. It must be a priority of this body to provide the resources and enact common sense reforms to protect every Missouri community. There is no excuse for inaction.

I know this task won't be easy. Bold actions in this building are an open invitation to critics resistant to change. But Missourians are ready for real action.

Missourians deserve the opportunities that come with safe, growing communities. And they are ready for us to lead.

We also know the key to opportunity starts with access to education. Missourians should have opportunities to choose where they send their children for a high-quality education, and parents should have a stronger voice as it relates to the substance of what is taught to their kids each day.

For too long our teachers have been compensated by an out-of-date pay scale. It's a flawed system that rewards time served instead of output and innovation.

Teaching is difficult and our State needs to reward teachers for success so our children have access both to great teachers and choices for education.

Making key, strategic investments is necessary to prepare the next generation for the jobs of tomorrow. I am confident we can do this and hold the line on our fiscally responsible budget.

Today, Missouri is sitting on the largest budget surplus in our state's history – 5 to 6 billion dollars.

As a fiscal conservative, I believe government should provide responsible infrastructure spending. I also know that our citizens are the best stewards of their money, and I believe we can build on the tax cuts from last year's Special Session.

There is more room to return money to Missouri taxpayers! This is money that hardworking Missourians have earned. It is in fact their money.

Reducing our tax burden will make Missouri even more competitive to recruit a talented workforce, to build prosperous communities, grow small businesses, and create more opportunities for all.

We must also capitalize on our strengths. In the real estate market location is everything. Missouri must do a better job of building on our geographical advantages!

Missouri is within 500 miles of almost half of our country's population and 44% of our country's manufacturing. We're also the home of North America's second largest, and most efficient inland port system.

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Missouri's location places us in an essential position to move material, goods, and people across our country. We must do a better job and embrace this competitive advantage.

Missouri is also a leader in innovation.

We are the home of cutting-edge advancement in agriculture, bioscience, geospatial technology, national defense, and logistics.

There are few places that can rival Missouri when it comes to bioscience. St. Louis alone has over 1,000 plant science PhD's and more than 700 bioscience companies.

St. Louis is also home to our new National Geospatial Intelligence Agency Headquarters West.

It's also where some of the world's most advanced fighter jets are built that provide security to our nation and to our allies around the world.

The cutting-edge development taking place today adds to Missouri's rich history in aviation and makes our state one of the top aerospace manufacturing providers in the country.

Stretching from Kansas City to Columbia, the Animal Health Corridor has over 300 animal health companies, representing the largest such concentration in the world.

Columbia, the home of MU, operates the country's most powerful university research nuclear reactor. This reactor produces cutting-edge cancer therapies, and life-saving medicines that are only produced there, offering Missourians better access to innovative medical care.

Springfield is one of our State's leading manufacturing hubs with an impressive 33% job growth rate and home to leading transportation carriers.

And when you look outside our metropolitan areas, you see this same level of success and innovation all across rural Missouri.

Missouri, which is second in the nation with its nearly 100,000 farms, is blessed with a rich history and proud tradition of national prominence in the field of agriculture.

That tradition is carried on today by farmers whose hard work proudly places our state in the top 10 nationally in 12 significant commodities, including everything from soybeans, corn, cotton, and rice to beef cows, turkeys, hogs, and chickens.

These are just but a few examples of what makes Missouri uniquely positioned to be a world competitor and leader.

Our state is great in so many ways, but we know we have more work to do!

Here in this magnificent Chamber and this beautiful building, we will take on these challenges. We are the stewards of time passing through this Chamber and we must use this time wisely to influence the trajectory of our state.

This incredible structure, decorated with majestic marble columns and beautiful murals, is the product of the work of Missourians more than 100 years ago, Missourians who had vision: 100 years later their vision holds true and this building still serves the needs of the people.

But we also know that, just as those who went before us provided vision in this grand building, we too must provide vision for our state. Our State needs to continue to craft a vision of what it can and should be so it can meet the needs of future generations and our way of life.

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Carved into the entrance of the lower rotunda, there is an inscription taken from the Book of Proverbs. It reads, “Where there is no vision the people perish.”

It’s a powerful reminder that our job as public servants is not simply to find solutions to the problems as they arise, but also to craft and share our vision that will guide our state into the next 100 years, and ensure our future is one filled with success and prosperity.

As we move forward into this 2023 legislative session, I know there are tough issues we must tackle, but there are also areas we can address to ensure our state has a brighter tomorrow.

Missouri is well positioned. Look around us, to all of us having the honor and privilege to serve. We have a broad array of Missouri citizens in the people’s house from every corner of Missouri and with a variety of backgrounds and experiences. We have all we need to get things accomplished for Missourians.

Let the words inscribed by those that went before us inspire us. Let our Missouri values guide us. And let our ability to work together help us craft Missouri’s vision for the next 100 years.

Together we can continue to improve our great State, educate our children, grow our economy, keep our streets safe, preserve the American Dream, and build a more prosperous Missouri with opportunities for all Missourians and the generations to come. For United We Stand, Divided We Fall!

Thank you! God Bless you, the United States of America and the Great State of Missouri!